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ABSTRACT

The academic English-as-a-Second-Language program at Tokai International College (Hawaii), designed to bring students' English language skills to a level at which they can take degree-related credit courses, is described. The program, originally designed as a traditional second-language curriculum, was revised to consist of 3-hour instructional blocks each morning, have a thematic curriculum, offer a learner-centered and collaborative approach, and be team-taught. It was also intended that the instruction be holistic, integrating content, time factors, and teacher and student input. After six academic terms using this approach, the program currently offers three levels of instruction based on language proficiency. Two instructors team teach and develop curriculum at each level. Analysis of the program so far has revealed that the topical focus has been effective and that the program supports different learning styles, integrates skills in a natural manner, provides students with opportunities to use varied skill-learning and practice techniques, creates fewer time constraints for teachers, allows students to become better acquainted, builds student and class camaraderie, and allows students more time to learn from each other. Problems encountered center largely on team teaching. Eight specific suggestions for better team teaching have resulted. (MSE) Contains 11 references.

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Integrated Block Scheduling and Team Teaching in the STEP-UP Academic English Program at Tokai International College

Richard Raker

Tokai International College (TIC) is accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges as a two-year liberal arts college. TIC is designed to present effective educational programs primarily but not exclusively for non-native speakers of English. TIC offers an Associate of Arts degree. Within TIC is an academic English as a Second Language (ESL) program called STEP-UP (Short-Term English Program - University Preparation). The STEP-UP program has 11-week terms offered four times a year. One of the primary purposes of the program is to allow students to improve their English proficiency and academic skills so that they can enter credit courses in TIC's degree program.

One of the unique features of STEP-UP is its integrated blocks curriculum. Instructors work together to combine all of the language skills -- reading, writing, listening, speaking and grammar -- in a unified approach to learning. This learning is enhanced by merging the study and practice of language skills with the study of subjects of interest to the students. In this way, students are able to improve their proficiency in English and at the same time acquire knowledge in selected subject matter areas.

STEP-UP began in a traditional manner with the curriculum designed around language skills. The program offered the usual reading, writing, grammar, listening and conversation courses. After two terms the faculty made a decision, with the support of the administration, to develop integrated blocks involving all skills as the foundation of the STEP-UP program. This decision was made based on the faculty's educational background and teaching experience with reference to research and theory in the general education and English as a Second Language fields. The faculty decided that we needed a curriculum based on several principles of what were thought to be "good" ESL teaching and learning practices.

First of all we knew that we wanted to have more time with our students. According to an article which surveys the current research in education, there are 24 studies that indicate that a positive relationship exists between time and cognitive learning (Walberg, 1979). Our decision to have three-hour blocks each morning for a total of 15 hours per week allows our students to have more uninterrupted classroom time. Secondly, we wanted to make our classes interesting and academically relevant by adding content to the curriculum. We wholeheartedly agreed with the general consensus in the ESL field that language is learned most effectively when it is used for communication in meaningful, purposeful social and academic contexts (Snow 1989).

Therefore we decided that the curriculum would continue to emphasize language and academic skills, but would be thematic and topic oriented. Thirdly, we wanted a curriculum that would allow us to focus on the language skills of reading, writing, listening, speaking, but that would give us the time and flexibility to focus on just one skill or any other skills, such as structure or pronunciation, when needed. Therefore we chose to approach the language holistically in accordance with ideas in the field expressed through the Whole Language approach (Rigg, 1991). We also wanted a curriculum that was learner-centered and collaborative, where the teachers and students collaborate with each other to create knowledge rather than a place where teachers just transmit knowledge to students (Nunan, 1992). Finally, we knew that to accomplish all of the curriculum changes and innovations we were planning we would need teams of teachers working together. The research in the field of education concerning the relationship between team teaching and student achievement is mixed. Armstrong (1977) and Cooper (1973) give evidence suggesting that team teaching is not effective in promoting students' academic achievement, while others (Mansell, 1974; Zipko, 1979) conducted studies that suggest team teaching is effective. Even with the mixed results of these studies several researchers have concluded that team teaching in ESL courses has pedagogical merit (Armstrong, 1977; Nunan 1988). We decided that we would give team teaching a try and that we would attempt to document our findings and concerns regarding team teaching and integrated blocks to share with others.

In short, our task was and still is to design and implement a curriculum that is integrated in the most complete sense of the word. We wanted to develop a curriculum that is integrated by skills, integrated by content, integrated by time, and integrated by teams of teachers and students working together.

The integrated block system was implemented during the Spring term in 1993. We have completed six terms utilizing this organizational and curriculum structure. The STEP-UP program currently offers three levels of integrated blocks designed for students from an intermediate to an advanced level of proficiency. Two instructors team teach and develop curriculum for each level. Integrated and thematic texts such as Cambridge University Press's *Interchange* series (1991), McGraw-Hill's *Interactions and Mosaic* series (1990), the *ScottForesman English* series (1991), Heinle and Heinle Publishers' *Tapestry* series (1994) and *Past, Present, and Future* (1990) are utilized as basic texts. In the afternoons, STEP-UP offers elective courses such as conversation, grammar review, TOEFL preparation, vocabulary development, English though drama, Study Skills, American Culture through Media, and Magazine reading, etc.

As part of the on-going curriculum development process the STEP-UP faculty have an in-service work day each term. Part of these work days are devoted to discussing

current STEP-UP issues, but a large portion of the work day is always spent discussing and planning curriculum for the integrated blocks. During a meeting in the Winter or 1994 the STEP-UP faculty tried to examine through guided discussion the effectiveness of our integrated blocks. As a result of our discussions we were able to list some of the positive and negative observations made by faculty concerning the integrated blocks. Our positive observations are given below:

Positive Observations:

Focus on topics in textbooks has been successful.

Focus on topics offers needed context for effective language learning.

Integrated approach to skills reinforces different styles of learning.

It offers a more natural way of integrating skills.

Gives students opportunity to use a variety of techniques to learn and practice skills.

Teachers have fewer time constraints in developing lessons.

Students have the opportunity to get to know each other better.

The approach builds student and class camaraderie.

It allows students time to learn from each other.

The general consensus was that the integrated blocks were benefiting the students. The observations seem to fall into three general categories; 1) focusing on content or topics, 2) integrating skills, and 3) fostering collaborative efforts among students and teachers. We were pleased that a majority of the positive observations about the integrated block approach were student-centered. It is important that we consider our observations carefully as they are only our perceptions and no empirical data has been gathered to support our beliefs or the effects of the approach on student achievement. Bailey (in Nunan, 1992) also reached a similar conclusion in her research were she had 60 teachers with team teaching experience react to statements about team teaching. However, the positive observations we listed and the discussion during the in-service work day indicated that the faculty were able to implement many of the concepts we considered when adopting the integrated block system.

The negative comments rising from our discussion were primarily concerned with the team teaching part of our approach. The faculty discussed and gave several considerations for more successful team teaching. These were primarily centered around faculty relationships, working styles, classroom logistics and administrative support.

These considerations are given below:

Considerations for Successful Team Teaching:

Need for agreed upon division of labor.

Need for more effective coordination in lesson planning.

Need for agreement on record-keeping responsibilities.

Need for consistency in the enforcement of such procedures as tardiness and absences.

Need to reconcile and capitalize on different teaching styles or approaches.

Need for honest and continuous feedback between members of the team.

Need for a system to be set up to resolve conflicts between team members.

Need for teachers to choose their own team partners.

The concerns expressed by the STEP-UP faculty are similar to concerns expressed by faculty in other team teaching situations; Rutherford (1976), Nunan (1992), and Bailey (in Nunan 1992). Further discussion also revealed that a "tag-team" approach was a more appropriate, and in some cases a more comfortable description of the current situation. The faculty agreed that with further experience and administrative support an actual "team teaching" approach could be implemented. The concerns expressed by the faculty were developed by the program director into eight helpful suggestions or rules that can be used to improve team teaching coordination and working relationships. These rules or suggestions were presented to the faculty at our next in-service work day and revisions were made by the faculty. The list below is the result of our efforts:

Eight Suggestions For Better Team Teaching

Suggestion #1: The "you're too busy, I'm too busy" syndrome

> Make time to meet with each other on a regular basis. Meet in neutral areas where you won't be distracted by other work or demands.
> [Team teaching takes extra-ordinary amounts of communication]

Suggestion #2: The hand-off rule

> When handing-off make sure you touch base and pass the ball. Know which direction your partner is running so that you're **not** going in the opposite direction. Be sure you communicate during the transition periods (break).
> [Students need to have smooth transitions]

Suggestion #3: The observe-your-partner principle

> Observe each other teaching at least an hour per week. Watching your partner teach will tune you into each other's styles, philosophies, and areas where the course needs to be strengthened. Think positively and learn from each other.
> [Know thy partner]

Suggestion #4: The team-teaching maxim

> Team teach at least one hour per week. Choose activities to teach together that will create excitement for you and your students.
> [Hey! This is supposed to be fun!]

Suggestion #5: The woodwind and strings thesis

> Everyone is different. So be it. The students benefit by having different teachers with different styles and viewpoints.
> [An orchestra is made up of many different instruments]

Suggestion #6: The never-forget-the-students effect

> Always be prepared to do what's best for the students. Remember to keep your classes student-centered, task-oriented, collaborative, and communicative-based.
> [Be flexible, the students will appreciate you for it!]

Suggestion #7: The "if there's a problem talk about it" rule

> Be sure to be honest with your partner. Discuss problems early on and suggest solutions in a peaceful non-threatening manner.
> [Do unto others as you would have them do unto you]

Suggestion #8: The "establish clear rules and follow them" principle

> Set up clear rules for classroom behavior, attendance, tardiness, homework, breaks, etc. with your students. Be sure both teachers and students understand and agree on the rules. Then enforce them consistently.
> [What goes down, comes around]

Conclusion

Our process of integrated blocks development and continued implementation has convinced the faculty and staff of the STEP-UP program that our integrated blocks approach is worthwhile and that while there may be problems with the team teaching part of the approach, it is clear to us that there are advantages for our students. Our discussions concerning team teaching and the suggestions we developed for more successful team teaching invited welcome improvements to our program and have had a positive effect on our working relationships. Many questions remain and much work still needs to be done in order to continue our efforts towards having truly integrated blocks. Further research will be initiated to 1) document more precisely our teachers attitudes towards team teaching, 2) determine what our students' attitudes are towards our integrated blocks approach, and 3) assess if our integrated blocks approach has any

measurable effects on student achievement. In spite of the numerous questions our integrated blocks approach leaves unanswered, we hope that this account of our experiences will assist others who are attempting to implement an integrated blocks approach or a similar team teaching situation. We have benefited from our efforts and our program has become stronger because of our shared experiences. All of the faculty, staff, and administrators at Tokai International College and the STEP-UP program are committed to the continued development and improvement of our integrated approach to English language teaching.

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